Keri Hulme's Breath Poetics[1]

ABSTRACT
Breath plays a small, but important, role in the work of Keri Hulme. My interest in this essay is to consider what happens when Hulme's representation of breath is brought into conversation with the respiratory poetics of modernism, modernist anthropology, and planetary modernism to address Hulme's contribution to an Aotearoa New Zealand modernism. This conversation is played out in Keri Hulme's treatment of *hau* or 'breath'. The essay argues that Keri Hulme, in her prose works *the bone people* (1984) and *Te kaihau/The windeater* (1986), develops a respiratory poetics: an interrogation of anthropology through experimentations with form.

Keri Hulme, Marcel Mauss, *hau*, breath, modernism

This essay considers the significance of breath in Keri Hulme's first fictions, the Booker-prize winning novel *the bone people* (1984) and her short fiction collection *The Windeater/Te Kaihau* (1986), as it relates to the broader question of Hulme's relation to Aotearoa New Zealand and Global Modernism.[2] Hulme frequently describes breath in highly aestheticised terms of bodily excitation, as 'ecstasy' or 'sweet' (*TWTK* 216). Particular acts of inhalation or exhalation in Hulme's work, however, serve a more social function: they mark patterns of relations between different people, or between these people and their environment. Breath is both a description of embodiment and a process involving interpersonal entanglements. As this essay unfolds, I show how these two generic aspects of breath might be used to align Hulme's work with other modernists interested in the aesthetics of breath. And yet, reading breath in Hulme's work as 'generic' ignores her culturally specific understanding of its relation to *hau*, the Māori term for 'breath', 'spirit' and the 'wind of life'. By considering Hulme's engagement with breath, via *hau*, I identify her work as engaged with a longer history of Aotearoa New Zealand modernism.

I

In order to demonstrate as axiomatic the importance of breath for Hulme, I open my discussion with a moment from the title story of *The Windeater/Te Kaihau*: '[o]rdinary day-to-day breathing is fine, having the charm of novelty inasmuch as every lungful is slightly different, and deep breathing alright for some situations, and meditational breathing okay if you like meditation, but what I'm talking about is the awareness of breathing' (*TKTW* 216). The description appears under the subheading 'Never the Same Wind Twice', explicitly linking 'breath' to the wind of the story's title. To 'eat the wind', the passage implies, might simply mean 'to breathe'. But breathing is necessarily differentiated: the awareness of breathing, in Hulme's description, differs from other forms of breathing, whether the day-to-day, the deep or the meditational:

> Some mornings I'd wake up very early and grin with delight as I drew in that first conscious chestful of air. It tasted better in my lungs than wine ever tasted on my tongue. It was ecstasy, it was *sweet*, air soughing in and all my little alveoli singing away with joy and oxygen-energy coursing through every space and particle of me. I could feel my heart in its cardiac sac swell and float, held down only by ropes of veins… it flutters against those ties, wanting to soar in free air as a great luminous pulsing living balloon… hey! grab another breath! This time'll do it!
> You've heard skylarks duelling for space, each pegging his own sky-claim with frantic song, making a chestburst effort to keep every other dueller fenced out as they quest higher and higher into the blue yonder? Sometimes I'd feel like their song on ordinary everyday air.
> I *love* breathing! Damn, but am I going to do it hard when I stop. (*TKTW* 216–17)

Breathing, here, is conscious. Rather than the meditative, the deep or the day-to-day, it registers as enjoyment, 'delight', tasting better than wine. This enjoyment aspires to ecstasis, the state of being outside the body: the heart 'flutters' against the 'ropes of veins', 'wanting to soar in free air'. Like the frantic song of skylarks, 'ordinary everyday air' gives, with each

breath, a fresh opportunity to achieve 'ecstasy'. At the same time, it remains rooted in the body, in the heart, the alveoli, the taste of the breath ('*sweet*'), and 'the oxygen-energy' that courses 'through every space and particle of me'. Engaged in a personal dialectic between ecstasis and rootedness, Hulme's description of breath also invokes social relations: the possessiveness of skylarks, in particular. She 'feels like their song on ordinary everyday air'. Breath has personal and the social dimensions that, although not without tensions, open up the possibility of an affective filiation, dependant on shared enjoyments rather than species identity.

As an aesthetic description, the passage uses techniques long associated with Euro-American modernism by juxtaposing descriptions written in different registers and breaking the paragraph at a poetically significant moment. Air 'soughs' in (affirming action equivalence between the wind and the breath), the heart 'swells', 'floats' and 'flutters'. This poetic language is interrupted by a 'hey' and 'This time'll do it!'. Embodied description (the conscious chestful of air) and extended metaphor (the skylarks) give way to Antipodean slang, the expression, 'am I going to do it hard'. Often associated with the 'hard time' of prison terms, the phrase might refer literally to the quality of the breathing activity itself: the speaker will breathe 'hard'. The final word in the line, 'stop', turns 'hard breathing' into euphemism, as if to stop breathing, to die, were simply a prison sentence to be endured. At the same time, the paragraph breaks create a visual correspondence between the opposition between the personal dialectic of the speaker and the social function of the skylarks, emphasised by an unspecified 'you'. If the personal and the social marked an affective filiation, the use of jarring registers and visual line breaks suggests we might understand Hulme's aesthetics as 'modernist', in the loose sense that the term takes when made to signify a mode of experimental poesis set up in opposition to realism.

The passage draws on two representational strategies that compound its associations with Euro-American high and late modernism. First, the syntax has what Walter Benjamin, writing of Marcel Proust, called a 'physiology of style'.[3] For Benjamin, a physiology of style describes the mimetic reproduction of physiological conditions in literary style: 'Proust's syntax rhythmically and step by step reproduces his fear of suffocating' (214). Hulme's juxtaposition of multiple registers reproduces the breathy excitations of her first chestful of air. At the same time, Hulme's writing has a typographical presentation that marks it as a prose equivalent of Charles Olson's projective verse. Olson, in his 1950 manifesto, 'Projective Verse', would advocate for poetry to 'put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings'.[4] But Olson is ultimately less interesting in a physiology of style than in 'the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, […] can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases' (57). In line with a projective prose, then, the paragraph breaks, indents, and capitals in *Te Kaihau/The Windeater* or *the bone people* may be read as visual cues to different modalities of speaking, thinking, writing, breathing. Breathing, for Hulme, is marked, conceptually, descriptively, syntactically and typographically. Accordingly, breath in Hulme's work may be read according to a late modernist sociology, in a tradition that reflexively enmeshes either Proust or Olson, and, formally, as an innovation mobilised to combine multiple, clashing registers,

and, descriptively, as a stylistic feature that reflects, aesthetically, on modalities of embodiment.

Hulme's interest in breath may be filiated with modernism, as, for her narrator, its embodiment is filiated with the skylarks, according to two different traditions of thinking about 'modernism': the first — aesthetic — focuses on description, while the second — sociological — addresses relation. Before I turn to influential attempts by Susan Stanford Friedman and Frederic Jameson to unite, or at least correlate, these traditions, I want to suggest that Hulme's emphasis on unities of enjoyment, rather than essentials of species-being, offers an alternative correlation, by thinking of (aesthetic) breath as a (sociological) matter of queer affiliation. As I hope to show, breath's queer affiliation does not simply stand alongside the models of modernism proposed by Friedman and Jameson, it challenges aspects of their conjoined modernism/modernity, registered respectively as networked and singular. In Hulme's breath, we find the residue of a longstanding debate about the Māori word *hau* (wind, spirit or breath). *Hau*'s appropriation by Western anthropologists (namely, Elsdon Best and Marcel Mauss) has granted it a hyperbolic spiritual significance. Attempts (including by Hulme) to rehabilitate the term, and thereby reassert its cultural purity, often fail, as Jeffrey Paparoa Holman has argued, to address the significance of figures like Best in preserving this knowledge: '[Best's] definitions of important Māori words such as hau (breath) and wairua (spirit) found their way into New Zealand's principal Māori language dictionary, Henry Williams' *Dictionary of the Māori Language*'.[5] Contestations about *hau*'s significance and cultural purity become themselves sites that demand alternative forms of filiation that rebound not merely upon Keri Hulme, but also her position as an Aotearoa New Zealand modernist.

II

In her first iteration of the work that eventually became *Planetary Modernisms*, Susan Stanford Friedman takes these different paradigms as the basis for resisting a fixed definition for the interrelated terms, modern/modernity/modernism: '*modernity* is a term at war with itself, a term that unravels its own definition, a term that codifies the principle of indeterminacy and in so doing opposes its own commitment to perpetual change'.[6] Following Friedman, we might aim to find in Hulme 'the aesthetic dimension of any given modernity', one more of those 'different forms in which writers and artists innovate, break with past conventions, and "make it new" in the context of the shattering or exhilarating modernities in which they live'.[7] Friedman suggests that to create a planetary aesthetics that is 'transformative rather than merely additive', 'we must look across the planet, through deep time, and vertically within each location to identify sites of the slash — modernity/modernism — then focus our attention on the nature of the particular modernity, explore the shapes and forms of creative expressivities engaging that modernity, and ask what cultural and political work those aesthetic practices perform'.[8] Identifying the 'slash' presupposes the modernity and modernism under discussion, which, in turn, determines the relevance given to aesthetic practices that do, or do not, do cultural and political work.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the most obvious 'site of the slash' would be the settler colonialism against which Hulme writes. The resulting, unsettled haunting of Hulme's

Indigenous subjects reminds us of the 'double dislocation' that identifies 'Antipodean Modernisms' for Prudence Black and Stephen Muecke: 'first the colonials who thought they had to 'catch up' with European social and cultural trends, then 'behind' them the indigenous peoples who were thought to be civilizationally backward and therefore nowhere near modernism'.[9] If Black and Muecke usefully problematise these positions, by avowing forms of Indigenous Modernism, they do not address the intricate role that 'Antipodean' modernism plays in the formation of key thinkers of European modernity, nor in the reciprocity that has meant such formations have usually been a matter of co-production. Moreover, it occludes the controversial role that Indigenous Modernists, like Hulme, have played in specific histories of Indigenous writing in English. After all, *the bone people* must be understood in relation to other, more local, socio-cultural movements, such as the so-called 'literary renaissance' of Māori writing in English, from the founding of the magazine *Te Ao Hou*, 'a 'marae' on paper', in 1952 to C. K. Stead's infamous condemnation of the work in 1985, as 'a novel by a Pakeha which has won an award intended for a Maori'.[10] Alice Te Punga Somerville's elegant solution to Stead's 'problem'—to refer to Hulme as Māori—does not resolve the definitional problem presented by my attempt to identify Hulme as a modernist.[11] The identification continues to fall into what Friedman identifies as epistemic 'traps': using binary, circular or metonymic modes of thinking to understand modernist writers.[12] In reading Hulme as a modernist, we must try not to recapitulate a systemic exclusion of Māori identity (binary), while also being wary not to take Hulme herself as a cultural mediator (circularity) or spokesperson for Māori life in general (metonym). If settler colonialism provides the site for Hulme's work, it cannot, in itself, determine the aesthetic decisions that make her a modernist, global or otherwise.

Friedman's sociologically astute model of reading can provide a useful frame for determining Hulme's place in a modernist constellation, but it works on the assumption that the aesthetic case has already been made. Yet, if Hulme's aesthetics make the modernist label useful when thinking about her work, they also undermine the clarity of Friedman's modernism/modernity slash, especially with regard to *hau*, whose reception remains a contested site of Māori- Pākehā exchange. A more exacting description of modernist aesthetics is necessary, even if it sacrifices the sociological complexity of Friedman's network model.

Adapting Fredric Jameson's description of Beckett's late modernism in *A Singular Modernity* (2002) to read Hulme's dialectical treatments of content and form in *the bone people* provides a useful, if contingent, statement on modernist aesthetics:

> an anecdotal core […] always marks the inassimilable empirical content which was to have been the pretext for sheer form. […] the shock lies in discovering […] an empirical situation […] which might have offered the material of a dreary [romance] novel and instead persists as the indigestible brute facts to which form reverts over and over again in its vain attempt to dissolve them.[13]

Insofar as Beckett's works return to the same anecdotal positions, whether seated at a desk or lying down in the dark, it seems like the anecdote is superfluous to Beckett's 'real' focus, form. However, the situation's persistence through the oeuvre means it cannot be discarded

as irrelevant: rather, it functions as a 'brute fact' that form cannot digest, whether through generic handling (the dreary novel) or repeated experimentalism.

Subjecting *the bone people* to Jameson's model would produce the following reading. The anecdotal core of the novel is the story of Kerewin Holmes's meeting with Simon Gillayley, and her subsequent relationship with both Simon and his foster father, Joe. Kerewin, who is often read as an analogue for Hulme herself, lives in a tower on the outskirts of a fictional Whangaroa on the South Island.[14] Simon trespasses into Kerewin's tower, thereby initiating the relationship between the three. Simon was found as a baby by Joe on the beach after a shipwreck. Joe has adopted Simon and their relationship is equally loving and abusive. As a result of the meeting between Simon and Kerewin, Joe begins a friendship with Kerewin that will challenge many of his core assumptions about Māori identity, sexuality and the environment. Eventually Joe is arrested for a near-fatal beating of Simon, Simon is taken into care, and Kerewin, partly in response, burns down her tower. After each undergoes an experience of physical, psychic or social rehabilitation, they reunite, quasi-phantasmagorically, at a feast in Holmes's newly built spiral home, a shape whose expanding mobility contrasts with the austere singularity of the tower. Against the backdrop of this ostensibly quite conventional story of meeting, disruption and reunification, however, the novel does try to 'make things new' in its representation of Aotearoa New Zealand society, by imagining 'newness' as a form of kinship that queers the conventional, heteronormative family unit — a 'queer kinship', in Elizabeth Freeman's definition, that presents 'an embodied but not procreative model' and gives rise to a habitus.[15] If the anecdotal core of a novel like *the bone people* — scenes of domestic violence set against the backdrop of a reunification story — offers the material of Jameson's 'dreary romance', it is the form of the narrative that attempts to digest this violence.

It suffices to compare this 'digested' reading in the Prologue of *the bone people*, 'The End at the Beginning', where the characters are imagined, 'after' the epilogue, as proleptically reunited. In three successive paragraphs, Simon, Joe and Kerewin are each described as walking down the street, making contact with people passing, responding to the environment, and holding each other's hands. Each thinks of change, and, optimistically, the final paragraph brings them together through change: 'They were nothing more than people, by themselves […]. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great […] the instruments of change' (*BP* 4). Following these four paragraphs, three short sections introduce each character's 'beginning': for Simon, it is the moment of the shipwreck; for Joe, it is the need to complete a heteronormative family with his dead wife Hana; for Kerewin, it is her decision to build the tower in 'the frivolity of the beginning'. But, in each narrative instance, both proleptic and analeptic, the characters remain unnamed. Indeed, it is only when we return to the Prologue, after the Epilogue, that we can see these 'instruments' for what they are: participants in a new configuration of relation. While the form aspires to this new configuration — a relational allegory if you will — there is still a Jamesonian 'undigestible core' to the novel: for critics from Stead to Antje Rauwerda, this is the beating of a child.[16]

When Friedman aspires towards a planetary modernism, she demands that we be 'diametrically opposed to' Jameson, who 'impoverishes what needs to be a complex approach to the overdeterminations of history and the enmeshments of different systems of

power in understanding modernity'.[17] Friedman thus establishes an impasse between her work and Jameson's, over the complexity of their approaches. In either of Friedman's cases, the socio-historical or the literary-situational, the aesthetic break remains anthropological since it focuses on the 'cultural work' of practice: 'the creative expressivities engaging that modernity'. Jameson himself suggests that theorising modernism as a reaction to modernity might be extended to describe an aesthetic engagement with the new historical situation and the process whereby we get there, 'a reaction that can be aesthetic and philosophico-ideological, just as it can be negative as well as positive' (99). If Jameson anticipates Friedman's argument, he also dismisses it as a product of the critics themselves: 'unfortunately it is our idea, and not that of the various national traditions'.[18] For all Jameson's 'impoverishment', he raises an important problem for Friedman's network approach: the imposition of 'our idea'. Friedman's schema is, necessarily, a prolegomena to a greater, collaborative work, since no critic can address all planetary modernisms in any kind of detail. Such collaboration means that the aesthetic breaks, shifts or changes tracked by modernist critics rely, to some extent, on anthropological accounts of modernity, which address the origins of terms and meanings. As result, particular terms risk being reified in the collaborative process of planetary modernism because of, rather than despite, their cultural specificity.

When we link Hulme's formal interest in breath with concerns germane to her 'national tradition' we find a clear illustration of this problem. Breath means something both to Hulme and to a tradition of thinking, objectifying, and reifying Māori experience, a tradition with a particularly modernist thread. For the remainder of this paper, I want to set up breath as a productive site of tension, between a more aesthetic, Jamesonian understanding of Hulme's work, and a more sociological, Friedmanesque planetary modernism, that inaugurates an alternative, queer affiliation. Before I make this move, however, I want to establish this tension as part of a breath tradition in Māori cosmology. This tradition might be identified as global and modernist, since it involves the circulation of a Eurocentric ethnographic conversation that took place in the modernist period, and that had the modernist aim of 'making anew' our understanding of classical political economy. But it remains fundamentally particular to Aotearoa New Zealand modernism, since it concerns the way *hau* is itself the site of contested Māori-Pākehā exchange.

Here, I am thinking particularly of Marcel Mauss, the French anthropologist who based his general theory of obligation ('the gift') on his understanding of *hau*.[19] Mauss's theory of obligation arises in response to historical materialism. In Mauss's reading, Marx claims an inevitable teleology of enlightened self-interest in the development from barter-based to money-based economies. Mauss, as a non-Marxist socialist, sought to challenge the *a priori* acceptance of exchange-based economies as 'natural' by invoking gift-based economies as anthropological exceptions to this 'naturalism'. But, as Matthias Frisch succinctly observes, 'you have to be able to explain why a gift should obligate the recipient to reciprocate. If the gift did not bind the recipient to return the favour, the gift could not institute social relations'.[20] In order to develop this 'bind' or 'tie', Mauss turned to *hau*, 'the spirit of things'.[21] His understanding of *hau* comes from his reading of an exchange between the Māori philosopher Tamati Ranapiri (Ngati-Raukawa) and the ethnographer Elsdon Best.

Although Mauss internationalises the conversation, then, the cross-cultural exchange between Ranapiri and Best makes of it a matter of global modernism.

In his account, Ranapiri first distinguishes a 'spirit' *hau* from the more conventional interpretation of *hau* as wind. The former, Ranapiri explains, is attached to treasures (*taonga*). When these treasures are given, they carry their *hau* across to the recipient, a *hau* that can only be passed on if something be given in exchange, or if the object is returned to the giver. This observation led Mauss to declare:

What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive [*n'est pas inerte*]. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary just as, being its owner, through it he has a hold over the thief. This is because the taonga is animated by the hau of its forest, its native heath and soil. It is truly 'native': the hau follows after anyone possessing the thing.[22]

Mauss understands the gift in relation to *hau*; this much is taken from Tamati Ranapiri's description. But his reading relies, in some ways, on a relation to theft. He suggests that *hau* allows the owner to exert a claim over 'the thief'. In an article for the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* published in 1900, Best, Mauss's source for Ranapiri's notes, glosses *kai hau* in a similar context: 'Should I dispose of some article belonging to another person and not hand over to him any return or payment I may have received for that article, that is a *hau whitia* (averted *hau*) and my act is a *kai hau*, and death awaits me, for the dread terrors of *makutu* (witchcraft) will be turned upon me'.[23] One of the earliest critiques of Mauss, by Raymond Firth, drew on this passage to argue that *hau* cannot have the animism Mauss assumes, since magical intervention is still required to regulate the unlawful appropriation of *hau* (*kai hau*).[24] *Hau* must, in a sense, be enacted, operated upon, even though such operations may constitute a kind of theft: ironic, perhaps, given Mauss's own theft of the term.

In the wealth of scholarship on *The Gift*, that theft has reproduced itself, since little attention has been paid to Kaupapa Māori scholarship on *hau*. Despite first appearing in Ranapiri's letter, the tendency has been to follow Mauss, rather than Ranapiri, or even Best, when considering Ranapiri's remarks on *hau*. Georgina Stewart (2017) resuscitates the context of the conversation to demonstrate that *hau* is both more prosaic and more interesting than Mauss thought.[25] Stewart notes that Mauss's selective reading of the source material meant that he failed to contextualise it within Māori cosmology, which would have demonstrated a linguistic ambiguity in the formulation 'hau of the gift'. Ranapiri's letter to Best responded to a series of questions about *hau ngāherehere* ('hau of the forest'). Mauss, when reading Best, blurred the *hau*of gift and forest, whereas Ranapiri invoked the former simply as an analogy to the latter. As a consequence, Mauss reifies *hau* as a 'spirit' inherent in objects (gifts or forest). Stewart prefers the phrases 'hau in relation to gift' or 'hau in relation to forest' to 'of the', because they emphasise the mutability of *hau* 'in relation to' the adjective that modifies it. Far from being a reified concept, the term is a descriptor of social obligation that acts differently in different linguistic contexts. This is clearer when the term is returned to the context of Māori cosmology, which, Stewart observes, hardly happens in

commentaries of *The Gift*: 'Mauss failed to account for the personified Māori cosmos, and ended up invalidly personifying 'hau' instead, in his delineation of 'hau taonga' as the 'hau of the gift' — the 'spirit' of the object given'.[26] Since Mauss's narrative fails to include Māori culture in Aotearoa New Zealand modernism/modernity, it remains necessarily incomplete, Eurocentric and monolithic.

This oversight can be understood as the failure of one form of modernism to recognise another. Rebecca Colesworthy has demonstrated how Mauss's work on the gift can be considered a modernist project, especially insofar as Mauss was looking to the gift as a means to critique the social contract of the post-war years: 'Mauss's *The Gift*, I argue, exemplifies a distinctively modernist oscillation between defiant critique of capitalist modernity and optimistic investment in its possibilities, unearthing the potential for alternative social forms *within* its morass of ideological and structural contradictions.'[27] Unfortunately, Colesworthy, by creating a wedge 'between a modernist fascination with the gift, on the one hand, and a modernist fascination with the primitive, on the other', misses the opportunity to reconsider the cultural context of *hau*, so often ignored in the post-Maussian tradition. She even risks recapitulating its cultural blindness when she follows Levi-Strauss in imaging it to be a 'zero symbol'.[28] Nevertheless, by presenting *The Gift* as a modernist text, she invites an analogous possibility: that Mauss, through his use of *hau* for his own modernist project, becomes implicated as a marginal, ill-informed, if influential, figure for Aotearoa New Zealand modernism.[29]

Hulme's own thoughts on *hau* do not explicitly engage with Mauss, but they do not have to, since it is Mauss that is the intellectual interloper. We might say, following Friedman's network model, that Mauss's discussions of *hau* subsumed the term into a global modernity (represented by a particular intellectual hegemony) and that Hulme's use of the term returns it to an Aotearoa context. This would, however, imagine that the term's meaning remained 'pure' in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. However, as Holman indicates, even in Aotearoa New Zealand, we must recognise the term's mediation through Best's letters, which means no prior 'purity' is possible, even were it desirable. Hulme's use reflects this 'contamination' in its polysemy:

Te Hau. *Hau* is the particular kind of breath that animates humans. It's the most lively element I know in weather terms. Winds are as various as creatures: boisterous, aggressive, gentle, comforting. On the other hand the one element that really gives me the heebies is the wind. I like the water, can deal with fire, the earth, even when it shakes. Tawhirimatea is the enemy of humans. The wind off the sea can be enormously draining.[30]

In this 1997 interview with Rima Alicia Bartlett, Hulme is responding to a question about the wind. Hulme replies by translating it as both *hau* and a 'kind of breath'. Here, Hulme exploits *hau*'s polysemy to reflect on how internal *anima* (breath) maps onto the external environment (wind), without collapsing one into the other. Importantly, breath has already emerged in the interview, and with similar stress on an entanglement with the environment. Asked how she 'accesses' her 'inspiration', Hulme comments, '[t]hat's sort of like asking 'how do you breathe?' I walk on the beach a lot, and the beach is always changing'.[31] Hulme responds to a question about inspiration, a metaphor associated with the *inspiratio* or 'breathing in the

spirit', by talking about actual breathing. Then, in the subsequent passage, she tracks, more explicitly, a similar etymology in *hau*. *Hau* operates figuratively and literally as breath, 'particular' but not unique to the human.

Such a work of reimagining puts Hulme into a longer conversation with modernism than either Friedman or Jameson might suspect, when she implicitly challenges a Maussian reading of *hau* by enumerating its possible meanings from the quotidian to the mystical. Rather than some elusive, singular concept, it must be thought of, much like 'breath' itself, as a term modified by linguistic and cultural contexts. Hulme responds to *kaihau* (shirker, layabout, or bankrupt) in a similarly recombinative way in a 1995 interview with Antonella Sarti. Sarti asks about the title of *Te Kaihau/The Windeater*, a title that, to her, sounds 'enigmatic and crucial'.[32] In response, Hulme reflects on her decision to translate *te kaihau* as 'windeater':

I love that word. It's a literal (and wrong) translation of *kaihau*, a woman of rank who eats sacred food to remove *tapu*. In other words, she eats the whole, the spirit, the breath, the wind of a happening that is loaded with dangerous energy. And there is a covert, esoteric meaning too. *Kai* is a prefix added to transitive verbs to form nouns denoting an agent – it means somebody who generates or operates. By doing this essentially ordinary ritual act of eating, thus removing *tapu*, she is actually generating a very powerful force. That's why she's got to be a high-ranking person.

It's a lovely word, and it loads a bit over into English with 'Windeater.' You can load most words but some are better than others.[33]

Hulme speaks of 'loading' words as they translate between Māori and English. The 'loading' of words, if I understand Hulme correctly, arises when, in the iteration of a word or phrase, different, even contradictory meanings are allowed to emerge. As she herself acknowledges, it is 'wrong' to translate *kaihau* as 'windeater'. But it is a productive deviation that, itself, can only be registered through foregrounding its translation. Neither term sufficient, both are required to register the linguistic deviation, its productive wrongness, and what that might entail. Hence, the title *Te Kaihau/The Windeater* combines English and Māori together, rather than simply choosing one or the other. The resulting polysemy allows for contextual variation, whereby the 'essentially ordinary' can also generate 'a very powerful force'. 'Loading' entails a conceptual 'thickening', whereby words like *kaihau*, *kai* or *hau* acquire the stasis-resistant polysemy described above.

When Hulme responds to Sarti, she brings up loading in relation to eating the wind (breathing): indeed, thinking of loading in processual terms can illuminate Hulme's aesthetic engagement with breath. *Kaihau* is 'better than others' not only because multiple definitions already exist, but because *kai* creates an agent that 'generates' or 'operates' on *hau*, a term she understands to denote, variously, 'the whole, the spirit, the breath, the wind of a happening that is loaded with dangerous energy'. But this operation demands careful attention. Referring to *kaihau*/windeater, Hulme states:

There isn't such a word, eh. There's a lot of us around though. I came across the term as a gift, if you like, a sort of found gift. For instance, you break up a perfectly respectable word,

happily married in all its component parts: you know it means several things, like a loafer or a braggart. Or a woman who takes part in certain rites. Or it can mean the acquisition of property without any return being made, as well as a spell that is cast to punish somebody behaving in such an unmannerly fashion. That's when it's a whole unbroken word, but if you split it, a power leaks out and becomes a woman trying to make sense of her self and her living and her world. (*TKTW* 232)

By 'splitting' *te kaihau* into *kai* and *hau*, Hulme exhumes 'a woman trying to make sense of her self and her living and her world'. In other words, an otherwise generic feature of language play in modernist aesthetics — the charging of terms — enables Hulme to respond to a specifically Aotearoa/New Zealand modernity, with specifically Māori forms of meaning-making. But this 'splitting' needs to be measured against Hulme's other efforts to 'load' *te kaihau*. In the appendix to *the bone people*, Hulme translates *te kaihau* as 'lit. windeater. Can mean either wanderer or loafer' (*BP* 541). The protagonist, Kerewin Holmes, uses the term to refer to her wandering three times (*BP* 15, 118, 507), and refers to herself as 'Kerewin *te kaihau*' twice (*BP* 499, 521). In the Sarti interview, *te kaihau* is a woman of rank who eats sacred food to remove *tapu*. The description from *Te Kaihau/The Windeater* pulls these meanings together with a further significance: 'the acquisition of property without any return'. The meanings are multiple, non-contradictory, fragmentary. The final description, with its ambiguous, ambivalent phrasing, seems to imply 'theft', although it may also be 'a sort of found gift'. In each case, the operation of *kaihau* leads to or from deviant behaviour: theft, idleness, purification, spells. Each enacts itself as a reaction to the possibility of possession.

Matthias Frisch suggests that *hau* designates the 'unpossessable', which 'cannot but be passed on toward an open-ended future to-come'.[34] Here, Frisch's Derridean reading of Mauss is useful, even if he implicitly relies on the reification of *hau* that Hulme and Stewart (and Anne Salmond) deconstruct. For while Hulme's discussions of *hau* and *kaihau* demonstrate their multiple meanings, they suggest a reciprocal concern with possession: with both that which is unpossessable, but also how that which is unpossessable must be disposed of, when the *tapu*, or taboo, is violated. In the most practical sense, this preoccupation with *hau* and possession may explain why theft grounds so much of the narrative in *the bone people*, especially in creating the necessary conditions for the characters' eventual queer affiliation. Kerewin's first encounter with Simon, which begins when she returns from wandering on the beach ('Te Kaihau'), ends with Simon stealing a chess piece (*BP* 15, 53). Each time Joe finds out that Simon has stolen, he beats him. The final, epochal beating that costs Simon his hearing happens after Kerewin tells Joe that Simon stole her knife (*BP* 373–76).

There is a latent, disturbing reading, then, that might find Joe's beating to be a necessary reprisal for Simon's theft. Keown and Rauwerda suggest as much, when they read Hulme's extensive and detailed descriptions of Simon's beatings as acts of symbolic violence, necessary to redress the imbalance caused by the original theft of colonisation.[35] Joe recalls that 'it doesn't even seem like him I'm hitting. His disobedience or something…' (*BP* 211). Joe's attempts to hit Simon's 'disobedience or something' might be better understood as affective, rather than allegorical: he 'just get[s] wild with him every so often' (*BP* 211).

Against the complex readings of psychosocial retributive justice offered by Keown and Rauwerda, then, Joe's actions manifest themselves more as an affective response to an economy of exchange set up by the gift of his breath (*hau*). We should remember that when Joe describes the moment that he found Simon as a baby, cast up on the beach, he asserts that their relation was formed by his breath:

'I was quite sure he was dead. But I cleaned out his mouth and nose, and pressed water from his lungs, and breathed for him.'

He is silent for a minute.

'He has got that of me, I suppose. My breath…"' (*BP* 105)

Simon is indebted to Joe for his *hau*, which sets up a strange set of filial obligations and expectations that Simon's wanderings (*kaihau*) violate. But there is also an alternative meaning to Joe's breathing for Simon that belies his use of the possessive 'my breath': breath is something that passes on to a future to-come, and that is, therefore, inherently unpossessable.

Joe's phrase, 'he has got that of me, […] my breath', suggests an alternative concept of filiation to the biophysical or genetic. Simon himself eschews descriptions of his relation to Kerewin and Joe that fit with already existing strategies of naming: '[a]nd if he can't go home', Simon muses when separated from Kerewin and Joe, 'he might as well not be. They might as well not be, because they only make sense together […]. He doesn't know the words for what they are. Not family, not whanau… maybe there aren't words for us yet? (E nga iwi o nga iwi […]) [o the bones of the people/o the people of the bone]' (*BP* 479). In other words, filiation in *the bone people* is better understood as queer affiliation. Stead, in his otherwise trenchant critique of the novel, suggests that 'the imaginative strength of the work' might be thought of in manifestly queer terms: 'it creates a sexual union where no sex occurs, creates parental love where there are no physical parents, creates the stress and fusion of a family where there is no actual family'.[36] Stead's negative dialectic presents the possibility for a queer reading of the novel, as a challenge to heteronormative understandings of sex, parental love and family.

Existing criticism has described other queer relations in the novel in similarly embodied terms. The novel 'remould[s] the body politic', in the words of Michelle Keown, by challenging the representation of bodies across five normative identity structures: filiation, race and gender as above, but also ability and environmental attitude. In a pioneering article for postcolonial disability studies, for instance, Clare Barker shows how the novel engages with postcolonial disability in a more nuanced and sophisticated way than most critics, many of whom were happy to read Simon as a 'prosthetic contrivance' symbolising Aotearoa New Zealand as a 'damaged, yet surviving, nation'.[37] Instead of reducing Simon to the facticity of his disability, Barker argues, the novel imagines him as a social agent, in a move that queers normative ableism. In the related field of postcolonial environmentalism, Laura Wright demonstrates that *the bone people* 'refuses to advocate [an] imaginary return [to an inherently conservationist Māori population] but instead borrows aspects of both Māori and Pākehā mythology to posit a contemporary model of environmental and social responsibility'.[38] Joe, rather than representing an instinctive environmentalism because of his 'inherent' qualities as

Māori, must learn environmental conservationism from Kerewin, whose questioned Māori identity queers normative indigenous environmentalism.

Each reading attempts to 'disorient' ableist, essentialist heteronormativity by showing how the novel renders these apparently immutable, putatively unmarked identities contingent and temporal. In Simon's 'not family, not whanau', we might discern the novel's tendency to queer language, not just about filiation, but also about ability, environment, race and gender. This demands we shift the novel's treatment of queer identity to the identification processes that Hulme's language itself tries to queer. When Alice Braun concludes her analysis of Māori language in the novel, she invokes the breath as enabling such a process: '[i]n making her characters speak Māori, Hulme takes the language out of the museums and the dictionaries; it damages her [*la malmener*], but it also returns a lost breath of life [*un souffle de vie perdue*] so that she can, henceforth, say love in the contemporary postcolonial world'.[39]

Braun argues for a performative understanding of the Māori language in *the bone people*. Rather than simply exploit the language for its 'exoticism' or local colour, Hulme relies on a relationship between English and Māori to develop both characters and the plot. So, while *the bone people* owes much to the romance novel, with its 'schemas of separation and return, suffering and resilience', thus inviting a concomitant danger of exoticism, Hulme's Māori words subvert these schemas, providing a linguistic, rather than essentialist, basis for belonging.[40] Disputing critics like Simon During, who take Hulme's Māori to be an 'appropriation of the precolonial', Braun shows how the words become 'the cement of the relations that unify Kerewin, Joe and Simon and the Māori words that appear in the English text also materialize this intimacy through sharing a chosen language and not simply a given one'.[41] Rather than focus, as previous critics have, on the five forms of queer identity enumerated above, Braun asks what role Māori words might play in constituting these forms of belonging.

Braun shifts the conversation about Hulme's Māori language use away from earlier debates about pre-colonial authenticity (the kind of stasis criticised by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic* [2001]) to a reflexive anticipation of the prospects the language offers for performing these queer forms of futurity.[42] She identifies in Hulme's work a queer performative love-language underpinned by the breath. But her reading can only take us so far. Like Mauss, she essentialises 'the lost breath of life' through a reified treatment of Māori culture. Instead of *hau*, though, she focuses on greeting rituals, like the *hongi*, 'which consists in approaching the face of the other to breathe together for a short time the same breath'.[43] Of the nine references to the *hongi* in the novel, those with the greatest significance are moments when Kerewin explicitly chooses not to *hongi* (*BP* 108, 321), as a way of signalling her asexuality: 'don't come any closer to me, just close enough to be always welcome' (*BP* 321). Contrary to the muted romanticism, or reification, of 'the lost breath of life', breath remains decidedly, culturally, queer.

What Hulme's work demands, then, is a language able to articulate her apprehension of sociological newness, together with some sort of 'breath' to speak it. It may be in this latter part of my argument that Hulme's work best demonstrates its idiosyncratic modernism, since the queer affiliations imagined in *the bone people* emerge through reframing or reforming existing words, cultural symbols and contexts, to respond to concrete sociological

concerns of Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s. Reading it via the frameworks of Friedman, Jameson and Colesworthy links it to traditions of reading global modernism, whether for the sociological, the aesthetic or the historical: routes that have traditionally been used to identify peripheral modernists as, paradoxically, simultaneously party to metropolitan conversations from which they were also excluded. But this denies the ways in which global modernism has often already taken place locally, when terms like *hau* and *kaihau* are co-produced by cross-cultural exchanges like those between Ranapiri and Best. What Hulme does with breath — the inhale and exhale that, while universal to human and nonhuman warm-blooded life, also remains deeply embedded in cultural practice — is perhaps most demonstrative of her modernism, which, by engaging many styles, commits to none. It is apt, then, to conclude by returning to our opening quotation. Here, Hulme develops an image of duelling skylarks, each one frantic to 'peg' a sky-claim and 'fence' every other dueller out. But she does not liken herself to the skylarks themselves, who aim to possess the air. Rather, 'I'd feel like their song on ordinary air'. It is breath, alone, of 'ordinary air' that frees Hulme 'like [bird]song'. Such breath is infused with *hau*, not as anthropologically exceptional but as responsive to an alternative queer form of affiliation. It is in this queer affiliation that Hulme's breath poetics interfaces an Aotearoa New Zealand modernism.

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[1] I am indebted to Emily Timms, the editors of this special issue and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and suggestions. Any errors remain my own.

[2] Keri Hulme, *The Bone People* (1984; London: Picador, 1986) and Keri Hulme, *Te Kaihau/The Windeater* (1986; London: Sceptre, 1988). Subsequent citations are given parenthetically within the text as *BP* and *TKTW*, by page number.

[3] Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 201–16 (p. 214).

[4] Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 15-26 (p. 15).

[5] Jeffrey Paparoa Holman, 'Elsdon Best: Elegist in Search of a Poetic', *ka mate ka ora*, 2 (2006), 38–64 (p. 43).

[6] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 8.3 (2001), 493–513 (p. 505).

[7] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 332.

[8] Ibid., p. 70.

[9] Prudence Black and Stephen Muecke, 'Antipodean Modernisms: Australia and New Zealand', *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. by Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 961–75 (p. 962).

[10] For a deconstruction of the controversial 'Māori renaissance', see Chris Prentice, 'What Was the Māori Renaissance', in *Writing at the Edge of the Universe: Essays from the 'Creative Writing in New Zealand Conference'*, ed. by Mark Williams (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2004), pp. 85–108. See also 'Te Ao Hou/The New World', *Te Ao Hou*, 1 (1952), pp. 1-2 (p. 1); Chapter 1 of Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); C. K. Stead, 'Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature', *ARIEL*, 16.4 (1985), 101–08 (p. 104).

[11] See Alice Te Punga Somerville, *Once Were Pacific: Māori connections to Oceania* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 31; Alice Te Punga Somerville, 'Waharoa: Māori-Pākehā Writing in Aotearoa/New Zealand', in *Mixed Race Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Brennan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 200–24.
[12] Friedman, 'Definitional Excursions', pp. 506–09.
[13] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: An Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 209.
[14] Jacqueline Buckman, 'Challenging the Conventions of the Kunstlerro-Man: Keri Hulme's *the bone people*', *World Literature Written in English*, 35.2 (1996), 49–63.
[15] Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory', in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 295–314 (p. 303).
[16] Stead, 'Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*'; Antje M. Rauwerda, 'The White Whipping Boy: Simon in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 40.2 (2005), 23–42.
[17] Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. 59.
[18] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 99.
[19] There is, of course, a rich tradition of thinking about *hau* without sourcing it through Mauss; see e.g. Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 2004); Anne Salmond, *Eruera: The Teachings of a Māori Elder* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1980).
[20] Matthias Frisch, 'The Gift of Nature in Mauss and Derrida', *The Oxford Literary Review*, 37.1 (2015), 1–23 (p. 3).
[21] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 14.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Elsdon Best, 'Spiritual Concepts of the Maori', *Journal of Polynesian Research*, 9.4 (1900), pp. 173–99 (pp. 197–98).
[24] Raymond Firth, *Primitive Economics of the New Zealand Maori* (1929; London: Routledge, 2012), p. 413.
[25] Georgina Stewart, 'The "Hau" of Research: Mauss Meets Kaupapa Māori', *Journal of World Philosophies*, 2 (2017), 1–11. See also Anne Salmond, 'Māori and Modernity: Ruatari's Dying', in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Identities*, ed. by Anthony Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 37–58.
[26] Ibid, p. 8.
[27] Rebecca Colesworthy, *Returning the Gift: Modernism and the Thought of Exchange* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 5; see also Chapter 1.
[28] Ibid, p. 82.
[29] Ibid, p. 36.
[30] Keri Hulme, '"The wonder of words winds through all worlds": Keri Hulme talks to Rima Alicia Bartlett', *Wasafiri*, 12.25 (1997), 83–85 (p. 84).
[31] Ibid, p. 83.
[32] Keri Hulme, 'Keri Hulme, March 1995', interview by Antonella Sarti, in *Spiritcarvers: Interviews with Eighteen Writers from New Zealand* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 57–69 (p. 63).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Frisch, 'The Gift of Nature', p. 12.
[35] Rauwerda, 'The White Whipping Boy'; Michelle Keown, *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 108.
[36] Stead, 'Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*', p. 104.

[37] Clare Barker, 'From Narrative Prosthesis to Disability Counternarrative: Reading the Politics of Difference in *Potiki* and *The Bone People*', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 24.1 (2006), 130–47 (p. 131).
[38] Laura Wright, *'Wilderness into Wild Shapes': Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 156.
[39] Alice Braun, 'Les mots maoris dans *The Bone People* de Keri Hulme : exotisme et intimisme', *Revue LISA*, 13.1 (2015), <https://journals.openedition.org/lisa/8633> [accessed 27 March 2018] (para. 23 of 23). My translation.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Simon During, 'Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?', *Landfall*, 39.3 (1985), 366–80; Braun, 'Les mots', para. 17.
[42] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[43] Braun, 'Les mots', para. 20.